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OJCF weathers economic downturn

By Paul Haist

Philanthropic giving ordinarily dips in the first months of a new year after donors have completed year-end arrangements in preparation for filing their tax returns.

So, it was no surprise at the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation when giving there sagged somewhat in the first three months of this year. It usually does, said OJCF Executive Director John Moss.

With widespread uncertainty about the future of the economy in the midst of the fallout from sub-prime mortgage implosion, the declining dollar and rumors of apprehension about inflation, the slowdown in giving is a little more noticeable this year than in previous years, according to Moss.

“Giving slows down at this time of year, but you can feel the slowdown in the air now,” he said. “People are being a little more cautious.”

Caution is a way of life at the OJCF, according to Moss, who said the foundation’s investment side is deliberately positioned to face whatever pitch may cross the plate.

“We’re not trying to hit any home runs; we are cautious to minimize risk,” said Moss.

Minimize risk, yes. But the foundation is getting around all three bases and back home, just the same.

In its just-released annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2007, the foundation lists \$43.42 million in assets under management, up just over 20 percent from a year earlier.

The Jewish Review reported the OJCF’s 2007 results when the foundation’s independent auditor first returned its report to the foundation last November. However, it is useful now to revisit the foundation’s performance in light of changing economic circumstances (The OJCF annual report is inserted into this edition of the Jewish Review).

“Our funds are heavily indexed so they are a reflection of the larger marketplace,” said Moss.

That was good last year, as the foundation’s unprecedented \$2.5 million gain on investments in fiscal 2007 confirms.

However, to the extent that the foundation’s funds are indexed, it also means that its fortunes will track those indexes in less prosperous times; there is an upside and a downside in every cycle.

“As things are slowing, we’re participating in that slowing as well,” said Moss, who nonetheless remained confident owing to countervailing strategies in place in anticipation of cycles in the economy.

“Our asset allocation is very good; it’s well balanced,” said Moss, pointing to what he termed “fine-tuned” and “risk-averse” allocations across small-, mid- and large-cap companies and with international representation to provide equilibrium for disparate trends among various nations.

OJCF President Stan Blauer echoed Moss’s confidence.

“We had a remarkable year last year, as all the numbers show,” said Blauer. “As far as our investment side goes, we have a very experienced committee of lay and professional people, as well as outside investment advice. Our primary responsibilities are preservation of capital and growth so that the community’s funds are safe.”

Moss praised the foundation’s volunteer leadership as “very responsible stewards.”